

Taking RESPONSIBILITY

Standards for Ethical and Responsible Behavior

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For additional resources and information about this report, and about activities and grants focused on character education, visit: www.state.me.us/education/cep/homepage.htm

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Maine Department of Education
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“Instructors of youth in public or private institutions shall use their best endeavors to impress on the minds of the children and youth committed to their care and instruction the principles of morality and justice and a sacred regard for truth; love of country, humanity and a universal benevolence; the great principles of humanity as illustrated by kindness to birds and animals and regard for all factors which contribute to the well-being of man; industry and frugality; chastity, moderation and temperance; and all other virtues which ornament human society; and to lead those under their care, as their ages and capacities admit, into a particular understanding of the tendency of such virtues to preserve and perfect a republican constitution, secure the blessings of liberty and to promote their future happiness.”

Maine Law, 1821, as amended.

[Currently Title 20, Section 1221.]



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January 16, 2001

With a world more complex and with change more rampant than ever in our history, we are challenged to educate our children for a new future, where promises of prosperity, a civil society, and a thriving democracy are for all of our citizens. We are challenged both to educate our youth to higher levels of knowledge and skills than ever before, and to nurture our young people with the values, attitudes, and behaviors that will enable them to survive and prosper in society. Our schools alone cannot meet these challenges—all of us have a role in shaping this future for our young people and for our State.

Since the beginning of public education in America, our citizens have recognized that the aims of public education extend beyond academics to values, attitudes, and behaviors. Over the last decade, we have reaffirmed this broader purpose for our schools and students here in Maine. And the 119th Maine Legislature underscored this intent by calling for the development of standards for ethical and responsible student behavior.

To fulfill this charge from the Legislature, I asked leading educators and citizens of Maine to serve on the Commission for Ethical and Responsible Student Behavior, requesting that they draft statewide standards that would guide school districts across the state. The Commission has succeeded beyond what I had dared hope. In this document, *Taking Responsibility*, the Commission has connected standards for ethical and responsible behavior to Maine's *Common Core of Learning* and the Guiding Principles of Maine's *Learning Results*, landmark documents that articulate the "ends" of learning—what students need to know, and be able to do, and what attitudes they should reflect.

Significantly, this report identifies core principles and best practices for schools and communities to use in creating, practicing, enforcing, and assessing expectations for all students, enabling them to develop as ethical, responsible, and involved citizens. Further, this report defines the attributes of a healthy and sustainable process for schools and communities as they work collaboratively to develop their own core values and codes of conduct.

In undertaking this important work, the Commission listened to many voices, including those of students, welcoming them as integral participants. The highest compliment that can be paid to the Commission is that its work manifests the values in this document: respectful; honest; compassionate; fair; responsible; and courageous. This talented and dedicated group of Maine citizens modeled the very core values and attitudes that we seek in our young people.

I endorse wholeheartedly and adopt enthusiastically this report and the standards identified by the Commission. Now, communities across the state should work in earnest to mobilize their educators, school staff, students, parents, and citizens to adapt and implement these standards. The culture and climate of schools can begin to change immediately, if all involved make this commitment. Most importantly, this document is not for schools and educators alone. Community members and parents must actively engage in understanding and applying the guidance this report provides. Many communities have already begun, and we hope this document will energize and illuminate their efforts. To assist this work, the Department, working with other programs across the state, has established the Maine Character Education Partnership to provide information, grant resources, training, and technical assistance.

I commend the Commission for this powerful and compelling work, and I particularly thank the co-chairs, Rush Kidder and Jill Kaechele, for their skill and perseverance in shepherding this project, allowing the many voices and diverse contributions of the Commission to speak as one. This work will spark crucial conversations and action statewide and locally about how we nurture our youth so that all Maine students have the opportunity and guidance to be good students, good people, and active citizens.